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ABSTRACT

Within the research on teacher planning and decision making the principal is seldom mentioned as a key shaper of teachers' curricular and instructional decision making. This paper presents findings of a case study of two elementary school principals. The study examined the congruence between principals' aims and teachers' decisions; the statements regarding who or what influenced teachers' actions; and the principals' efforts to influence teachers' decisions. The theoretical framework was based on Blase's political perspective (1991) and Mazzoni's power-influence framework (1992). Data were obtained through questionnaires, documents, and interviews with 10 teachers and 2 principals in the two elementary schools. The findings show that one principal had a direct, visible influence on teachers' decisions and that the other principal showed considerably less direct influence. Teachers' curricular and instructional decisions were contingent upon a web of five interrelated factors: (1) the clarity of the principal's goals and his or her capacity to communicate and connect them to action; (2) the principal's awareness of resources; (3) the principal's motivation to deploy resources; (4) the principal's skill at employing and combining strategies; and (5) a setting conducive to principal influence. Principal influence is thus a conditional, reciprocal phenomenon. Finally, the political perspective and the power-influence framework are essentially valid and valuable tools for exploring principal-teacher interactions. (Contains 30 references). (LMI)

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The Elementary School Principal's Influence  
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## INTRODUCTION

The literature on the principal as an instructional leader implies that the principal should, and could, influence teachers' curricular and instructional decision making. Yet, within the research on teacher planning and decision making the principal is seldom, if ever, mentioned as a key factor shaping teachers' curricular and instructional decisions. This apparent paradox in the literature provided the impetus for a study that sought to uncover how, if at all, elementary principals might influence teachers' curricular and instructional decisions (Larsen, 1995). Such a study was undertaken to help "unpack" this apparent paradox as well as address other related gaps in the literature on the principal's ability to influence this important aspect of schooling.

For example, the effective schools based literature on the principal as an instructional leader often admonishes principals to exercise influence but provides little information on the processes through which influence might be exerted (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan & Lee, 1982). Other strands of literature also tend to neglect the "how" of instructional leadership (Achilles, 1987; Deal, 1987; Greenfield, 1987). Although more recent studies rooted in notions of micropolitics identify strategies principals employ to exert influence on teachers (Blase & Kirby, 1992; Kleine-Kracht, 1993), these studies are limited in number and scope. To help reconcile the contrasting views regarding whether principals influence teachers' curricular and instructional

decisions as well as explore how they might do so, case studies that focused on the dynamic interactions of principals and teachers in the domain of curriculum and instruction were conducted.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the case study findings. Since a detailed treatment of the research design and the individual cases is available elsewhere (Larsen, 1995), this paper offers a brief overview of the research, summarizes key findings, and highlights their implications for future research.

#### **OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

This research relied on a qualitative, multiple-case study design to explore how, if at all, two elementary principals influenced teachers' curricular and instructional decisions. The conceptual framework which guided the exploratory case studies viewed principal-teacher interactions around curriculum and instruction as fundamentally political in nature (Blase, 1991; Hoyle, 1982; Larsen, 1995). Given that orientation, Blase's broad notion of micropolitics as a power-based interaction and his characterization of principal-teacher dynamics as inherently political were merged with Mazzoni's more explicitly defined framework for examining power-influence relationships. This framework directed attention to: 1) goals of principals and teachers; 2) resources principals can use to exert influence; 3) motivations of principals to deploy resources; 4) strategies principals utilize in an attempt to influence teachers' decisions; 5) perceptions of the impact of the strategies employed; 6)

reasons why some strategies are influential and others are not; and 7) insights regarding the manner in which features of the setting may condition the flow of influence. Attention to these matters provided a basis for eliciting the detailed accounts of principal-teacher interactions needed to gauge whether principals are exercising significant influence and to tease out factors that may account for principal influence or lack of influence on teachers' curricular and instructional decisions.

This political perspective was used because there is growing evidence that principal-teacher interactions in the volatile area of curriculum and instruction are fundamentally political in nature (Larsen, 1995). This framework was also selected because it directs attention to what actors within a system actually do and how they do it, yet keeps an eye on the manner in which the setting conditions their opportunities to influence interactions (Kanter, 1972). In short, the framework "fit" the phenomenon of interest.

But even with a sensible analytic framework, gauging and interpreting influence is not a simple, straightforward task. The key concepts of power and influence are complex and contested terms (Dahl, 1984; Pfeffer, 1980). Moreover, the multiple forms and means of influence make it hard to calculate precise degrees of influence (Larsen, 1995). Recognizing these difficulties, the framework employed here embodies multiple but general criteria for gauging influence. Those criteria include: a) the correspondence between actor goals and decision outcomes; b) the patterns of

attributions (who is viewed as influential); and c) the analysis of influence efforts drawn from detailed descriptions of the resources and strategies employed. These analyses serve as a check to see whether attributions are warranted and whether outcomes are the plausible result of the actors' efforts to exercise influence (Gamson, 1968; Geary, 1989). Following these general guidelines principal influence was gauged by examining: a) the congruence between principal aims and teachers' decisions; b) the statements regarding who or what is influencing teachers' decisions; and c) the principal's efforts to influence teachers' decisions in the domain of interest. The factors that may account for the patterns of influence were derived from a systematic analysis of each case and a comparative analysis of the two cases.

Two elementary school sites were targeted based on the principal's reputation as a strong, instructional leader. Data sources included questionnaires, documents, semi-structured interviews with ten teachers and two principals, augmented by follow-up telephone calls to informants to correct or corroborate emergent themes. Analyses of the individual cases were conducted according to the designated categories of the conceptual framework that guided the research: actors, goals, resources, motivations, strategies for influence, setting features that condition the opportunities for influence. Individual case narratives were developed, then a cross-case analysis was completed. Throughout data collection and analysis, a variety of recognized "checks" for bias and error were incorporated. Those included providing

anonymity and confidentiality to informants, continuous interrogation of data, efforts to corroborate and triangulate data from multiple sources, efforts to subject analysis to collegial review, and explicit articulation of "chains" of evidence (i.e., the links between evidence considered and inferences drawn) (Yin, 1984).

#### KEY FINDINGS

Although the research set out to examine two sites where principal influence was reputedly present and demonstrable, the in-depth case study data demonstrate that at one site the principal clearly influenced teachers' decisions, and at the second site the principal was considerably less influential (i.e., subtle and indirect). Indeed, the influence pattern may have been reversed. At the second site it appeared that the teachers were exerting substantial influence on the principal's decisions. This unexpected discovery meant the analytic task was different than anticipated, yet still important. Rather than offering a cumulative, case analysis, the study yielded a cross-case, comparative analysis of the data that allows one to look for the presence of forces where there is high influence and the absence of forces where there is less obvious, or more subtle, influence.

When the two cases were juxtaposed it was clear that both principals had a reservoir of resources that could be used to influence. Indeed they had highly comparable if not equivalent resource bases. For example, both possessed expertise, credibility, position, and funding. Thus the potential for

influence was clearly present in both instances but evidence of influence was considerably more substantial in one case. These contrasting cases suggest that given a comparable reservoir of resources principal influence is shaped by other factors. Five sets of interrelated factors may be particularly helpful in accounting for the high-influence and low-influence patterns that were unexpectedly uncovered. The five factors are: 1) goals; 2) resources; 3) motivation; 4) skill; and 5) setting. Their presence in Case One and absence in Case Two suggest that they may be important "explanatory" forces.

**Goals: Clarity, Communication, and Connection to Action**

To exert noticeable, detectable influence, the assumptions of the framework applied to this study suggest that goals are important because they help actors focus their resources in pursuit of aims, rather than dilute resources across a range of intents. While goals may be general and elusive, they can also be more focused. They can provide fairly definitive targets to gauge progress, and accomplishment, as well as to guide the use of resources. In addition, where goals affect others, they must be conveyed to and understood by others. Although both principals had goals, and created a climate of support for teachers' goals, a major contrast between the two cases was on the clarity of the two principals' goals.

In Case One, the principal's stated goals regarding curriculum and instruction included: 1) offering a recess alternative to students; 2) modifying the school calendar; 3)

becoming a "pilot" school in order to implement a new math curriculum school-wide; and 4) implementing a new reading curriculum school-wide. The principal augmented her broad aims with more focused aims. She then articulated those and used them to guide her decisions; she deployed resources strategically to advance those aims.

For example, when pursuing participation in the math pilot, she presented school-wide math test scores to the faculty to demonstrate low student achievement in math. Thus, she convinced the faculty that the math curriculum they were currently using was not working and a change was necessary. Then, she wrote a grant to compete for one of the two math pilot spots available for the district. This resulted in additional resources being allocated to the building to pursue a math pilot. As one teacher described the process:

I think the district started looking at different math programs and then [the principal] needed to convince the staff that we should be a pilot school and apply to be one of the two pilot schools that they choose and she was able to.

In another instance, when interviewing for teaching positions at the building, the principal clearly articulated her goals to potential employees. In this way, she could hire teachers who either already had similar goals or who were willing to support her goals. Having goals and clearly articulating them allowed the principal to create a more homogeneous faculty and, in turn, move the faculty along in a common direction.

Another example was related to how the principal pursued a change in the calendar. She clearly articulated the details of the proposed calendar change in a written document which was shared with the school board, district officials, staff, and parents. The plan was also shared verbally at board meetings and community meetings. The principal's skill in written and verbal communications was an advantage in articulating her goal to multiple constituency groups.

Goals guided this principal's actions and decisions about how to deploy and combine resources to shape what was going on in the school. There was some resistance among the faculty and parents to the philosophy presented in the math pilot, as well as in other goal areas, however, in spite of resistance, the principal continued to pursue her aims. As summarized by one teacher informant, "[The principal] is really clever and I think she gets her way pretty much."

In Case Two, the principal's stated goals regarding curriculum and instruction included: 1) assisting teachers with the implementation of district adopted curriculum; 2) making teachers aware of available curricular and instructional materials and methods; 3) enhancing collaboration among teachers; and 4) engendering cooperative learning in classrooms. The principal created a climate of support for teacher aims and initiatives as well, but had her own agenda and priorities. However, this principal was more elusive in her aims and reactive in her responses. She offered general support for anything going on,

which reflected what she claimed were her top priorities--assisting staff with the implementation of district adopted curriculum and making teachers aware of available curricular and instructional materials and methods.

For example, in describing her role in the implementation of a new, district-wide science curriculum, the principal said she was focusing on complying with district regulations and assisting teachers with implementation. In talking about supporting district initiatives, she said, "One of [my] biggest roles is as things are developed through the district, being responsible for bringing that back to the staff and working with implementation and helping them with timelines." Setting up times for teacher representatives from district committees, seeking representatives for district committees, and ordering materials were other examples demonstrating the principal's general goals. There was no evidence that she was promoting her two, more specific aims--cooperative learning and collaboration--although there was some evidence that these practices were occurring in some classrooms and among some grade level teams. Beyond supporting these general aims, the principal believed the teachers should make their own curricular and instructional decisions.

So, the major distinction here was not the number of aims, or, their specificity when initially identified, but the degree to which multiple, initially generally cast aims could be articulated, then translated into action, or used as a guide for a plan of action. In Case One, the principal had a more focused,

active agenda while the principal in Case Two had a general, reactive posture of "being supportive." Whether shared fully or partially or not at all by teachers, one principal had focused as well as general goals which gave direction to her actions and gave a yardstick marker to gauge progress and influence. It may be that the principal in Case Two was "caught" at a time of inaction and, hence, the study gave a distorted view, or that the researcher got trapped by difficulties of gauging influence. However, it does seem that one factor that distinguishes the two cases is the clarity of, and the focus on, goals. This contrast between the two cases suggests that clarity of goals, communication of goals in an active versus a reactive fashion, and connection of goals to the deployment of resources may be important factors for principals who desire to influence teachers' decisions.

#### **Resources: Awareness of Assets**

Along with goals, the assumptions of the framework draw attention to the need for resources that are relevant to an issue and arena of influence as a requisite for, albeit not a "guarantee" of, influence. Resources may be contacts, credits, assets, or capabilities. They may be related to the position of the actor or to personal characteristics, and may be tangible or intangible. Although resources are not actual influence, without resources, according to the framework, there is little or no potential to influence.

The bank of resources possessed by the principals in the two cases was strikingly similar; however, principal awareness of resources in their possession was strikingly dissimilar. Both principals possessed a variety of both positional and personal resources, and this appraisal was corroborated by both principals and teachers in both cases. The distinction between the two principals was their awareness of resources in their possession.

In Case One, the principal was quite aware of multiple resources in her possession, as was apparent in principal interviews. She "ticked" them off, identifying them readily and repeatedly. This awareness of resources was corroborated by some teachers and supporting documents. As reported by one teacher, "[The principal] looks professional, and, always attends classes and meetings. [She] brings people from the outside to help us work. [She's] always an advocate." Another informant said, "[She] pushes herself hard and is dedicated." Furthermore, she was actively seeking additional resources to add to her arsenal, most notably through writing grants, but also through reading, professional development, and pursuing contacts outside the school.

In Case Two, the principal initially identified only two resources available to her: department head positions and time (both of which could be potentially powerful resources, albeit indirect). Through further questioning on other matters, she described additional resources at her disposal, i.e., position, expertise, credibility, contacts, and funding. These descriptions

of principal resources were corroborated by teacher informants who noted that the principal had these resources available. For example, on the issue of time, one informant stated, "In the seven years I've been here, I've seen more [planning] time than ever before." Rather than directly identifying resources available for use, the principal tended to credit others with possessing valuable resources. For example, she spoke highly of a teacher who was conducting a class on whole language:

a real good example is that we have a second grade teacher who is doing a class this week on whole language. She is just always on the cutting edge and she's just a wealth of information. When I came here five years ago, she had only been here, I think, a year. And, that [whole language] was relatively new, so there was some skepticism about it. But, she has just done a really good job in making people feel comfortable and is now a real resource to them as well as to other grade levels--first through sixth.

Furthermore, she pointed out what excellent resources teachers generally were to one another.

As noted, resources available to the principals were fairly comparable but the awareness of what resources they possessed was not. In Case One, the principal credited herself for possessing numerous resources, as did the teacher informants. The principal in Case Two was more inclined to acknowledge resources possessed by others. This pattern suggests that beyond availability of resources, be they lodged in position or person, the awareness of those resources as the basis of influence may be a key determinant of principal influence. One must be in possession of relevant resources that can then be used to exercise influence. Then,

given the motivation and skill to do so, one has the potential to advance his or her aims. This similarity between the two cases suggests that although resources may be required to exert influence, they, alone, will not determine whether a principal is capable of exerting influence.

**Motivation and Skill: Combinations of Direct and Indirect Strategies**

The assumptions of the framework further suggest that given clear goals and relevant resources, motivation to deploy resources and the skills for doing so are important factors if one wishes to exert influence. Deploying resources in a focused, purposeful, skillful fashion to further one's aims is seen as necessary to influence other actors' decisions. There was some similarity in resources deployed by the principals in both cases. However, there is a clear contrast in the level of motivation and skill in deploying resources to further specific aims.

Both principals identified funds, staff development, and faculty meetings as strategies they commonly used in deploying resources. The difference was in the level of motivation and skill in utilizing, combining, and blending strategies to promote specific aims.

The principal in Case One deployed resources to affect specific aims and in greater combination than did the principal in Case Two. For example, as the faculty began implementing the math pilot, a goal of the principal, the principal made a point of observing math in classroom. As she noted, "I show up when

things aren't happening that I want to have happening. I am a physical presence." This strategy provided pressure as well as support for teachers in their efforts to implement the new curriculum.

In reading, another priority, the principal allowed flexibility in expending money originally set aside for workbooks which prompted teachers to go beyond a basal approach to reading. This strategy paved the way for changes in reading. When the district identified reading as a priority, the principal arranged for Jr. Great Books and Success in Reading workshops for the faculty. The principal strategically deployed, and tactically combined, resources to influence teachers in a proactive fashion. She focused resources to advance her goals purposely, and effectively employed strategies to further her goals.

In Case Two, there was little evidence to demonstrate motivation to deploy resources in pursuit of identified goals. This may well be because several of the goals were elusive and inclusive which provided no basis for focusing resources. Therefore, the principal ended up supporting anything and everything, which caused resources to be diffused across multiple goals. As a result, their impact on any specific goal was diluted. Motivation to deploy resources was more evident in supporting individual teachers' aims and district initiatives (both of which were important to the principal). The principal maintained that the primary strategy she employed to exert influence was utilizing observation post-conferences:

Probably the biggest one [strategy] is through follow-up conferences after observations, talking specifically about instruction and instructional strategies and that is often kind of a stepping stone for people particularly if you see a pattern or interest that they have . . . formative has really opened up some doors to generate some ideas instructionally.

But the post conference was not the only strategy. When a teacher who was especially interested in science had time available, the principal suggested schools where she could observe science lessons. Several other teachers were pursuing more literature to use in their classrooms, and, in support, the principal directed them to the PTA for funds. There was less evidence of motivation and action in deploying resources in support of initiatives of priority to the principal, including collaboration among staff and cooperative learning--two goals of the principal.

Here again, although resources between the principals were comparable, their motivation and skill in deploying them in pursuit of their own goals were distinct. In Case One, the principal demonstrated a high level of motivation to deploy resources in pursuit of her goals. Although she was also motivated to support teachers' aims, she clearly directed most resources toward promoting her professional priorities and persisted despite resistance in several instances. In Case Two, the principal deployed resources in support of teachers' aims and district initiatives--which were consistent with her general goals--but not to promote her two more specific goals. This

tendency resulted in a set of loosely-jointed activities that overshadowed, and perhaps overpowered, her efforts to advance particular aims.

This difference between the cases suggests that perhaps the motivations and skills of the principals were not comparable. Or, it is possible that in Case Two the goals of the teachers corresponded so closely with the principal's aims that one could not discern whether collaboration and cooperative learning, for example, were being promoted by the principal. A third possibility is that there was reciprocal influence operating whereby the principal was responding to the influence of the teachers. In any case, this contrast between the cases suggests that motivation and skill in deploying resources to further one's own agenda are important influence factors, assuming that agenda is of primary importance.

#### **Settings: Student Populations and District Practices**

Lastly, the framework presumes that the setting conditions the flow of influence. Given clear goals, an awareness of potentially powerful resources, the motivation to deploy resources to attain goals, and the skill with which to do so, the setting may be a determiner of the degree of influence an actor, like a principal, can exert on other actors, like teachers. Although there were similarities across the two cases, there were also some definite differences.

In both cases, contextual factors were identified as mediating factors on principal influence. The factors were

similar, as well. Teachers and principals both identified money, time, parents, staff, and the district as mediating the degree and impact of principal influence. Lack of resources, such as money and time, lessens the opportunity to exert influence on teachers' decisions. As parent, staff, and district input is taken into account by the principal, it has the potential to dilute or diffuse the principal's influence on teachers' decisions. There were two distinct differences in the two settings, however: student population and district practices.

#### Student Population

In Case One, the student population was described as lower-middle to middle class. This description was corroborated by the fact that approximately 26% of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. In addition, 10% of the population spoke a language other than English as their primary language. These factors and standardized achievement test scores had qualified this school for additional district monies based on "at-riskness" of the population. This pattern suggests there may have been pressure and/or support from parents and district officials to make changes to improve the school's ranking. Hence, incentives for principal activism may have been present in this case that were not present in Case Two.

In Case Two, students were described as middle to upper class with only three or four students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. In addition, the population was predominately Caucasian. Standardized achievement test scores at this school were above

average. This pattern may suggest that there was ongoing pressure and support from various constituencies to increase, or at least maintain, the current status. Or, it may suggest that there was less pressure and support because constituents were satisfied with the current situation.

#### District Practices

A second distinct difference between the two cases was in the operation of the district. In Case One, although district personnel determine curricular areas of focus, money was allocated to the building and decisions regarding curricular adoptions and scope and sequence were determined by individual building faculty. This arrangement afforded opportunity for the principal to exert influence over curricular decisions. This school district originally offered support for two of twenty-four schools in the area of math. Although a specific math philosophy was being promoted by the district, participation was optional and competitive. Also, resources were provided by the district for schools to determine their own reading curriculum. No specific philosophy was required which, again, afforded an opportunity for the principal to influence the faculty's curricular decisions. Although this principal claimed that instructional decisions should be left to the teachers' discretion, the data indicate that, at times, she had attempted to exert influence on teachers' instructional decisions as well. This was evident in her concern over teachers' interpretation of the Class Meeting format. At a

faculty meeting, the principal expressed concern over using Class Meetings for disciplinary purposes, although this was promoted in the training. In Case One, the district operated in a fashion that may have encouraged and enabled the principal to exert greater influence on teachers' decisions than in Case Two.

In Case Two, curricular determinations, i.e., adoptions and scope and sequence, were made district-wide by a district-wide committee. Representatives were appointed from each building to serve on curriculum committees. Under the guidance of these representatives, implementation was then the responsibility of individual teachers. Because curricular decisions were made district-wide, opportunity for the principal to influence the process lies primarily through the building representative. For example, the recent science adoption, which was opposed by at least one teacher, was made by a district committee, as was the handwriting adoption. In addition, this principal believed that the teachers should have discretion over instructional decisions. Therefore, she was choosing not to become involved, or exert influence, in the area of instructional decision making--although one of her goals was cooperative learning which is an instructional strategy. Additionally, the teachers' negotiated agreement provided for funding of two department head assignments in each school. This arrangement delegated some instructional leadership responsibility to teachers rather than to the principal. In this district, there appeared to be less

opportunity and support for principals to exert influence on curricular issues.

The similarities and differences across the cases may suggest that different contextual factors support or constrain principal influence and that not all mediating factors mediate the same amount or in the same way. In these particular cases, the greatest distinctions appear to be the student population and the operation of the district. This suggests that the setting, indeed, may condition the flow of influence.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

Although this study was intended to be a cumulative, case analysis of principal influence, the shift in approach, to a cross-case, comparative analysis, proved every bit as fruitful in its ability to generate insights about the phenomenon of interest. While the conclusions of the study are limited by the sparseness of related literature, the exploratory nature of the study, the small number of cases, and the conceptual framework and methodology selected for the study, the findings provide grounds for three major conclusions. These conclusions are introduced, briefly illustrated, then discussed in terms of related research.

#### **Web of Factors**

First, given comparable, and relevant, resources, principal influence on teachers' curricular and instructional decisions may be contingent on a web of five, inter-related factors. As the previous section illustrates principal influence on teachers' curricular and instructional decisions may be contingent on: 1)

the clarity of goals, and the capacity to communicate them and connect them to action; 2) awareness of resources; 3) motivation to deploy resources to promote identified goals; 4) skill with which to employ and combine strategies to promote identified goals; and 5) a setting conducive to principal influence. In the case of high principal influence all five factors were present and perceived to be important. In the case of low principal influence these factors were absent.

While the framework suggests that goals, resources, motivations, strategies, and setting are key, this study further refines these general understandings by suggesting what it is about these categories that may be important in detecting principal influence on teachers' decisions. The two cases taken together suggest that clear goals help to focus resources and strategies, awareness of resources increases the potential for influence, being motivated to employ multiple strategies to promote specific aims can be powerful, and a district that allows decision making discretion at the building may, in combination with the other factors, account for principal influence, or lack of influence.

Because the literature on principal influence is so thin, and survey oriented rather than case study based, it is not clear whether or not these refinements to the categories of the framework add to the understandings of principal influence. Generally speaking, surveys do not get at all of the categories, nor at the dynamics of principal-teacher interactions. And, the

scant amount of literature provides no way to "check" the refinements of these categories. Additional studies to test out these refinements are needed. Additional studies should not simply examine the general categories, but should go one step beyond and look at the features of each category. Until then, the question remains open as to whether or not these more refined factors extend the current body of knowledge on principal influence.

#### **Conditional, Reciprocal Phenomenon**

Second, principal influence on teachers' curricular and instructional decisions is not automatic nor uniform, but rather is a conditional phenomenon, and may involve reciprocal influence.

These cases demonstrate that principal influence is not automatic because in one case principal influence was apparent and in the second case principal influence was far less apparent. Within each case, the influence that was depicted was conditioned by a number of factors. Although there appears to be a set of factors that may account for this difference in the degree of principal influence, it is not apparent which case might be the anomaly.

Reciprocal influence was evident in that in one case, although the principal exhibited influence, she often aligned her strategies to teachers' goals and interests. Their goals and interests, and sometimes indications of resistance, influenced her decisions regarding her own goals, how resources in her possession were used, and strategies she chose to employ. In the second

case, the principal appeared to be influenced by teachers and influenced little, if at all, herself. Although she had goals of her own, resources were deployed and strategies were employed in support of teachers' aims and interests. In both cases, principals' actions were mediated and moderated by teachers' actions, which reflects the reciprocal nature of principal influence.

The literature on the principal as an instructional leader and teachers as decision makers may not be so paradoxical after all. Rather it may reflect the division in reality or reflect the conditional nature of principal influence (i.e., there may be influence sometimes and not other times). It may be that the literature on principals as instructional leaders oversimplifies the complexities of influence (i.e., admonitions for principals to be instructional leaders, as well as a reputation for doing so, does not mean that a principal will be influential in teachers' decision making). Another factor to consider might be the fragmented nature of the principalship. The job of the principal is described by Blumberg (1987) as "highly fragmented" where the principal has little time to devote to any one issue. Therefore, perhaps some principals purposely attempt to influence teachers' decisions and others do not depending upon what other demands are in competition. Furthermore, this literature fails to recognize that influence is not easily attained.

The literature on teacher decision making may have the same problem. By failing to mention the principal, the literature

implies that principals do not exert influence on teachers' decisions. In reality, it may mean that the issue has not been addressed or that the complex nature of principal influence makes it difficult to ascertain. The phenomenon of interest may be more complicated, hence, influence is more conditional. In short, the "resolution" of the riddle may be the conditional nature of influence, rather than a "paradoxical" puzzle in the literature.

The findings from this cross-case, comparative analysis are generally consistent with the broader set of literature on how one can exert influence in organizations. Dahl (1984) suggests that although influence can be unilateral, it is most often mutual, or reciprocal. In both cases, although the degree of principal influence varied, this was true. In one case, the principal aligned strategies with teachers' aims and interests, and made accommodations and adaptations in response to resistance. In the second case, the principal operated primarily based on teachers' aims and interests, and often made accommodations and adaptations when faced with resistance.

Relatedly, influence may be subtle and indirect (Bollman & Deal, 1991). The research on teacher decision making suggests that there are many influences on teachers' decisions (Clark, 1986; Cohen, McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Hawthorne, 1992; McCutcheon, 1982; Yinger, 1982), none of which are the principal. However, these cases illustrate that the principal influences, or can influence, the factors that teachers claim influence them. For example, teachers claim that such factors as resources and

materials, time, school organization, knowledge and experience, and students influence their decisions. Principals exert influence over all of these factors. This indicates a potential for second hand or indirect influence. In both cases, the principals exerted direct, observable influence and subtle, indirect influence. One principal observed at specific times in classrooms to exert pressure and support to promote math. This was a direct and observable approach. On the other hand, she lifted controls from reading expenditures in hopes that teachers would examine, and expand, their reading practices--an indirect, more subtle approach. The principal in the other case utilized observation post-conferences to exert direct influence. On the other hand, she carefully selected certain teachers to invite to attend workshops, which was an indirect, subtle action.

The cases suggest, then, that both streams of literature oversimplify the influence process. The literature on the principal as an instructional leader presents numerous admonitions, neglecting to address the complexities of influence and to acknowledge that multiple forces shape teacher decision making--many of which the principal can manipulate subtly and indirectly. The literature on teacher decision making seems to ignore the principal, most particularly how the principal can indirectly, or directly, and subtly affect factors that influence teachers.

There are other potential explanations for why principal influence is not acknowledged in the literature on teacher

decision making. For example, because autonomy for teachers is expected and accepted, it may be that teachers are reluctant to give credit to principals for influence. Hawthorne (1992) points out that school organization contributes to noninterference of administrators. Further, teachers are insulated by the isolated structure of schools. The school organization appears to encourage teacher autonomy over curriculum. Teachers tend to prefer autonomy, which may impact the potential for principal influence as well as teachers' willingness to attribute influence to the principal.

In summary, the mixed findings of this study--one case of high influence and one case of low influence--suggest that principal influence is oversimplified in the literature. Furthermore, it is a conditional, reciprocal phenomenon.

#### **valid and valuable Framework**

Third, the political perspective and power-influence framework are basically valid and valuable tools for exploring principal-teacher interactions.

This study applied a political perspective, introduced by Allison (1971), elaborated by Mazzoni's (1976) power-influence framework, and adapted to principal-teacher interactions by Blase (1991). The findings suggest that a political perspective and, more specifically, Mazzoni's power-influence framework are basically valid and valuable tools for examining principal-teacher dynamics and understanding the politics of principal influence, or lack of influence.

The perspective and framework were a valid approach because much of what was acquired from the open-ended questions posed to informants conformed to the categories of the framework. Through the interview process, informants provided information about principal and teacher goals, principal resources, the motivation and skill of the principal to deploy resources, and the context within which they work. In fact, the questions were open-ended enough to catch both evidence of high influence and evidence of low influence. The differences between the two were brought into focus by applying the assumptions of a political perspective, and examining and comparing each of the components outlined in the framework.

There is always risk in finding what one is seeking, and this model provided what the researcher was looking for, a case of influence, but not what the researcher expected, a second case of less apparent, subtle influence. Much of what was found, both in the case of high influence and the case of low influence, fit the precepts of the model, so it "fits", albeit in unexpected ways, with the growing body of literature that a political perspective is a valid way to get at principal-teacher relationships (Blase 1991).

This model was a valuable approach in that it corrected the reputational data criteria utilized in the study and unearthed some of the dynamics of principal-teacher interactions. The two sites for this study were selected based on the reputation of the principals as strong, instructional leaders. A reputation as a

strong, instructional leader proved to be an unreliable indicator of principal influence. In one case, the principal did exert considerable influence on teachers' decisions. In the other case, however, the principal exhibited much less apparent influence on teachers' decisions. The questions, derived from the framework, elicited information from informants that cast doubt on the assumption that principals with a reputation as strong instructional leaders necessarily exert influence on teachers' curricular and instructional decisions. The framework provided a "check" on the criteria utilized to select sites where principal influence was expected to be present.

The questions derived from the framework also secured detailed depictions of principal-teacher interactions that could be used to ground judgments regarding the degree of influence and the dynamics of it. The elaboration of the dynamics of principal-teacher interactions provided insight into how principals can, and do, exert influence through the use of resources and strategies, as well as insights into why principals may not be particularly influential.

This perspective was an effective tool for getting at principal-teacher interactions that are not addressed by the literature on the principal as an instructional leader nor by the literature on teacher decision making. This study suggests that a political perspective can help address that gap and extend other work (notably that by Blase) by getting at factors that may help

account for influence or lack of influence, hence, helping to understand the phenomenon of study.

The findings from the perspective employed are generally consistent with related literature. Empirical studies indicate that by attending to the general categories of the framework, one may uncover and interpret actor influence on decisions in organizations (Malen, 1993; Mazzoni, 1992). The extent of influence may be gauged by thick description of the dynamics of the actors. Throughout the effective schools literature, it is suggested that effective principals must be strong instructional leaders. The research does not, however, offer any direction on how a principal might become a strong instructional leader, nor how a strong instructional leader might behave. Therefore, a common understanding of "instructional leadership" is lacking, which may account for the unreliability of reputation as an indicator. The ability of this framework to elicit descriptions of principal-teacher dynamics is supported by this study and its application is fruitful. This is important because other streams of literature do not provide a suitable way to get at the dynamics of the interactions. So, this perspective is a basically useful addition to the literature on principal-teacher interactions.

Validity and value ought not be over-stated, however, as there was some reticence on the part of informants to respond to questions regarding resources and strategies for influencing. This may go back to the notion that politics, power, and influence are often considered "pejorative" terms. So, future studies may

want to temper the language by using terminology that conforms to the culture of schools, to more readily tap the perceptions of informants. These issues notwithstanding, this perspective and conceptual framework seem to get at the key features of principal influence.

#### **IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

This exploratory case study proved to be a serviceable approach to examining such a complex phenomenon as principal influence given the limited amount of related literature. As is the case with exploratory research, this study has created more questions than answers. Limited study has been conducted in the area of principal influence on teachers' curricular and instructional decisions, and the two streams of research (principal influence and teacher decision making) are usually treated as separate issues. This study has pointed out a need to bring the two streams of research together and to test the identified web of factors by further research of various types.

Additional case studies would allow one to determine if the more refined factors, "discovered" in this exploratory case, are useful in examining principal influence. Case studies over a longer period of time may provide a more dependable picture of principal-teacher interactions, as might case studies conducted at a different time in the annual cycle of the school year. A stronger case study design than the one used here would include a broader, as well as larger, population. Both elementary and

secondary sites would be considered. This expansion would allow for further testing of the identified factors.

A different approach, and perhaps a more robust design, might be a series of ethnographies. This topic of study meets Yin's (1984) criteria for conducting either a case study or ethnographic study. Because the reputation of the principal is not a dependable indicator of principal influence, an ethnography, like the study used here, would provide a way to get underneath that global assessment. In addition, it would enhance the case study approach with the ability to get at the more subtle forms of influence over longer periods of time. Case Two suggests that such research is needed because influence may be too subtle to pick up through interviews. Extensive and intensive observation may help to get at the more subtle forms of influence. Because the case study relies on recollection rather than observation, at one snapshot of time rather than over time, it may not get at the more subtle sides of power and more cyclical uses of it like an ethnography could since one is inside the school for a longer period of time. Actual observations may give a different view of what is happening. The subtleties of the interactions may be more apparent through observations than through interviews. In other words, an ethnography allows for a check between what is reported and described by the informants and what is observed by the researcher.

Although open-ended surveys can be helpful, generally speaking a broad survey does not get at the intricacies of

principal-teacher interactions. However, after more case studies and ethnographies have been conducted, a more refined survey could be developed. Then one could augment a case study or ethnography with survey data from more direct questions about various strategies. Or, a more carefully construed survey, based on findings from additional studies, might get at the conditional nature of principal influence. Questions may need to be adjusted to use more palatable language, i.e., language with a more positive connotation so informants offer information about the phenomenon of study more freely.

In sum, there is a need for more empirical research in the area of principal influence and how it might impact teacher decision making. As Blase and Kirby (1992) discovered, when the question regarding principal influence is asked, informants do give answers. This study suggests that the question should be asked more often. The literature on the principal as an instructional leader implies that the principal should, and could, influence teachers' curricular and instructional decisions. This study suggests that under certain conditions principals may, indeed, be able to influence teachers' decisions in the critical domain of curriculum and instruction.

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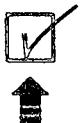
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